

1 CHAIRMAN JAMES: Courtney Blossom.

2 MS. BLOSSMAN: Madam Chairman, and members of the  
3 commission, I'm Courtney Blossman of Ocean Springs, speaking on  
4 behalf of a grass roots effort, the CEE Dialogue Group.

5 CEE stands for community, economy and environment.  
6 We believe that the Mississippi Gulf Coast can create a balance  
7 for a livable community, a thriving economy and a protected  
8 environment.

9 We call on this commission to recognize the problems  
10 of unprecedented economic growth, fueled to a large extent by  
11 casino development, and to endorse long-term planning solutions.

12 While economic opportunities are both beneficial and  
13 desired, unmanaged development can create irreparable damage to  
14 our community standards, culture and character and can place  
15 irreversible strains on important natural systems.

16 The Mississippi Coast is rich in history and natural  
17 beauty. Coastians have a strong sense of place and we want to  
18 maintain the integrity of our national areas -- natural areas and  
19 quality of life. There is a sense of frustration among the  
20 people that no one is listening to these concerns.

21 Regulatory and government agencies are being unduly  
22 influenced by the promise of a pot of gold. These concerns are  
23 clearly reflected in an in-depth poll of Mississippi Coast  
24 residents conducted in May 1998 by Southern Research Group on  
25 behalf of the CEE Dialogue Group.

26 Of the 1,013 coast voters polled, the majority of  
27 people, 78 percent, identified themselves as conservative or  
28 moderate and 74 percent said they go to the casinos. The  
29 overwhelming majority, 96 percent, believe that the coast needs a

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1 comprehensive plan to balance economic development with the  
2 preservation of the environment.

3 The poll shows that there is a need for agencies and  
4 local officials to cooperate in preserving important natural  
5 habitats, and that as the coast develops economically, our  
6 agencies and elected officials should address quality of life  
7 issues.

8 75 percent of the people want agencies and elected  
9 officials to limit commercial development in undeveloped  
10 wetlands. Natural resources suffer where casinos, by law, must  
11 locate on rivers or coastal waters. There are unique  
12 environmental problems associated with casino development in  
13 coastal Mississippi.

14 We have an extraordinary natural heritage which  
15 includes wetlands, bayous, estuaries and fisheries. These  
16 natural systems require critical consideration when siting  
17 casinos. Cumulative and secondary impacts must be examined.

18 High quality wetlands and estuaries are currently  
19 being threatened by proposed casino developments. Loss of  
20 habitat and other adverse effects are sure to follow. There is  
21 really no way to quantify the economic impact of destroying our  
22 natural systems.

23 We've heard the up side of gaming impacts. There's  
24 also a price to be paid by our community and environment, and  
25 there is a price. We are asking for equal value being placed on  
26 our community, our economy and environment. Thank you.

27 CHAIRMAN JAMES: Thank you very much.

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